

BOOK REVIEW

FA-TI FAN. 2004. **British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire and Cultural Encounter.** (ISBN 0-674-01143-0, hbk.) Harvard University Press, 79 Garden St. Cambridge, MA. (**Orders:** <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/>; 800-405-1619; email: Contact|HUP@harvard.edu). \$52.00, 238 pp, 16 illustrations, 9 1/2" × 6 1/4".

The Qing (Manchu) Dynasty lasted nearly 300 years (1644–1911). In the West it was the period of the Industrial Revolution, the rapid growth of scientific knowledge and discovery, and the rising imperialism of the 17th and 18th centuries. China had had its own economic revolution between the 8th and 12th centuries, but the potential of the great advances made at that time in agriculture, technology, large-scale industry, and the use of money and credit was reaching its end. So the two cultures were at different stages in the Confucian cycle of the rise and fall of states when they met.

Although the Chinese reaction to the increasing Western presence was to restrict foreign trade to a single port an enormous volume of Chinese goods (including flora and fauna) was brought to Europe. It not only affected European taste but was a great stimulus to scientific research in this area. This book, written from the viewpoint of a modern historian, traces the activities of the British naturalists within the cultural context, examining the institutional base of enterprise as well as the purposes, methods and results for each side. Because the British became predominant in the China trade, they were best able to meet the Chinese whose cooperation was essential to their work. The author insists that it is the 'mingling, hybridization, and confluence' across a variety of borders and barriers that made possible the great advances in ethno-botany, economic botany and Sinology of this period. While he does not downplay the role of British network of traders, diplomats, missionaries, professional collectors, geographers, and geologists, he gives equal (and previously unacknowledged) emphasizes to the part played by the indigenous people: the officials, merchants, compradors, servants, gardeners, craftsmen, artists, etc. His aim is to "explain the formation of scientific practice and knowledge in cultural borderlands during this critical period."

The book naturally divides itself into the time before and after the Opium War. Because the abrupt policy changes which followed granted Westerners generous legal and diplomatic rights and increased access to the interior of the country, there were important changes in the procedures. Both sections are extremely interesting and well-researched. An excellent index, copious notes, short biographies of the many British naturalists mentioned, maps and illustrations all add to the value of the work. *British Naturalists in Qing China* offers fresh insights into the very many aspects of Sino-British relations. It is particularly timely as China emerges as a world power.—Ruth Ginsburg, Botanical Research Institute of Texas, Fort Worth, TX 76102-4060, U.S.A.